

Story #47 (Tape 15)

Narrator: Abdullah Aslan

Location: Karahamzalı, Balâ kaza, Ankara Province

Date: February 1962

My Return from the War of Independence  
Independence -- War of

When the War of Independence was over, I was in Izmir. I was discharged and wanted to return to my village, and so I started walking.<sup>1</sup> I decided to work along the way in order to feed myself, and so, along the way, I stopped at a village and asked for a job as a farm hand.

The villager to whom I applied asked me, "Where are you from?"

"Haymana,"<sup>2</sup> I said.

"What do you do?" he asked.

"I am a farmer," I said.

"How much pay do you want?"

"One hundred and fifty liras a month," I said.

"All right," said the villager. "I hire you."

They gave me a stick with a point, a belt, and a piece of iron.<sup>3</sup> "Take these and go to bed. We shall show you which field to plow in the morning."

They had a comfortable house, and I could hear the villager and his family laughing and enjoying themselves. Synecdoche -- folk: belt for harness  
Belt -- synecdochic reference to harness

The next day they gave me the oxen and showed me the field to be plowed. I plowed for a while, and then I lay down in the field and fell asleep. While I slept, the oxen, with the yoke still on their shoulders, went and entered somebody else's field of wheat. After a while the owner of that field came

Synecdoche -- folk: piece of iron for plow  
Iron -- piece of -- synecdochic reference to plow  
<sup>1</sup>The lengthy and farcical account of the misadventures of a young man making his way home from a war is a definite type among Turkish folk tales. It is a tall tale of the Baron Munchausen kind, though there is usually much earthy realism mingled with the exaggeration.

<sup>2</sup>Haymana is a kaza merkezi (kaza center--the kaza being the administrative unit just under the province; comparable to a county in America). It is 75 km. south of Ankara.

<sup>3</sup>This is the peasant's literal way of referring to a goad, a harness, and a plow.

and kicked me hard and woke me up. I looked at him and saw that he was a husky man. "What do you want of me?" I asked him.

"What are you doing here?" he asked me.

"I am plowing this field," I said.

"Where are your oxen?" he asked me.

I looked about and saw that the oxen were in the next field eating wheat. He caught me by the ear and took me to the field and pointed at the oxen. Still holding me by the ear, he took the goad from my hand and started leading both me and the oxen back to the village.. After walking a way, he slackened his grip on my ear a little, and so I pulled my head aside suddenly and ran away from him into a nearby forest.

I saw a horseman approaching me after a short time, and so I said to him, "Selâmũnaleykũm."

"Aleykũmselâm," he said. "Where are you from?"

"Haymana," I said.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Oh, I am just trying my luck," I said.

"Would you like to work for me?" he asked.

"Yes, I would," I said.

"All right," he said. "Take this hound, this fur coat, and my sword to my house. When you reach the village, just ask for the house of Ali Bey. I shall see you there tonight."

I took the man's hound the fur coat, and the sword and started for the village. I had just one more hill to climb before I got there when I saw three flocks of sheep. With them there were <sup>dogs -- nine</sup> nine dogs, three dogs for each flock. I was afraid that they might knock me down and hurt me, and so I

flock + sheep - three

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gathered up some stones to throw at them. But they were attracted instead to the hound. I had put the horseman's fur coat around the hound, tying it there with my belt, in order to avoid carrying it myself. The sheep dogs chased this hound and one of them caught an end of the fur coat and tore it. Finally, the fur coat fell off the hound's back, and the dogs proceeded to tear the coat into pieces among themselves. The hound reached the village safely, and some time later I came along too.

I said to the villagers that met me, "Selâmünaleyküm!"

They said to me, "Aleykümselâm! What is the matter?"

"Where is Ali Bey's house?" I asked them.

"That is it, over there," one of them said, pointing to a large house

I went to that house, where I found two women baking bread. After the customary greetings, they asked me to sit down. I said to them, "Sisters, I am hungry." They brought a dish of pekmez and placed it on the floor in front of me and gave me bread to dip in it. I must have eaten more than I realized, for after a while my belly was quite swollen. It was sunset and we had all the animals in the stable by the time that Ali Bey returned.

"What is your name?" he asked me.

"Sorsavuş,<sup>4</sup>" I told him. *Name -- Humorous: Sorsavuş*

"Sorsavuş," he said, 'walk my horse for a while. It is sweaty and I don't want it to get stiff."

I walked the horse for a while, put it in the stable, and gave it some grain to eat. The lord of the house then showed me where to sleep. "You are to sleep in that bed over there in the stable, but before you do, I have another job for you." He had returned with two partridges which he had shot

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<sup>4</sup>Sorsavuş is a nonsense name which means "Ask, then go away."

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He gave these to me and he said, "Go and pluck their feathers and clean them in the spillway of water near the mill."

Singing a song, I took the two partridges to where he had directed me. Putting one of the partridges on the ground, I started plucking the other one. Just then a dog came along and snatched that other bird from the ground and ran off with it. When I took off my shoe and threw it at the dog, the partridge I was plucking fell from my hand into the deep water. As it was now quite dark, I could not find the shoe I had thrown at the dog, and so I returned to the house with just one shoe and no partridges. I was embarrassed to go to Ali Bey, who, in the meantime, had sent a man to search for me.

I said to one of the women, "Sister, have you got a dog?"

"No," she said, "but our neighbor has."

"He took one of the partridges and ran away with it, and I dropped the other into the water and could not find it again," I said.

"What happened to your shoe?" she asked.

"I threw it at the hound and could not find it again in the dark."

When the woman heard this, she thought it was very funny and she began to laugh, "Ha! Ha! Ha!"

With only one shoe on, I entered the room where the landlord was. "Have you lost your mind?" he asked me. When I explained what had happened, he said, "Go to bed!"

I went to bed, but after I had slept for a short while, someone started knocking on the stable door. I did not open it right away, and the person kept on knocking. I thought it was Ali Bey, but when I opened the door I discovered that it was his wife's lover. He had expected to find her there and not me, and he became angry. We started fighting, and I chased him around the stable like mad, from one corner to another. I threw my sword at



*Fool -- throws sword at adversary -- but kills cow instead*  
*Fool -- " " " --but cuts tendon of horse's leg instead*  
 him, but it missed him and stuck into the cow's belly. The animal cried, "Augh!" and died. I grabbed the sword and threw it at him again, and this time it stuck into the leg of the horse, severing its tendons. I took some mud and put it on the horse's leg to stop the bleeding. By this time, Ali Bey had heard the noise and come to the stable. His wife's lover had escaped.

"What is going on here?" he asked. I explained to him what had happened, and he then asked, "Why didn't you call me in time?"

"Well, sir," I said, "I am new here. I didn't know what to do."

"All right," he said, "go back to bed."

In the morning I heard that Ali Bey's camel driver, just back from a trip to Izmir, had become ill. Ali Bey decided to send me with the camels. *three*  
 He said, "Take these three camels and these six bags of wheat and go to the mill. *--six bags of* Have the wheat ground and bring it back as soon as possible. You can ride on this horse."

I had to cross the mill stream to get to the mill. When I saw the mill watching me, I called to him, "Where can I safely cross this stream?"

"Wade through over there where it is shallow," he said, pointing downstream a little way.

As I led the camels through the part of the stream where the miller had pointed, one of them slipped and fell. The two bags of wheat from its back started floating down the stream. First I tried to save the camel from drowning, but the other two camels became frightened in the confusion. Unable to save the camel which had fallen, I tied my horse's reins to the two camels standing in the middle of the stream and swam after the two bags of wheat. By the time I had dragged out the bags of wheat, the two camels had climbed out on the opposite bank. When they stood up on dry land, they were so much

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*Horse-- tied between two camels-- is strangled-- when camels rise*

taller than the horse that they lifted his front feet right off the ground. By the time I could cut the reins to release the horse, it had been strangled to death.

"Where are you from?" asked the miller in amazement.

"Haymana," I said.

"May God keep it so!" he said. "You are a good Haymana man. You have drowned the bey's camel and killed his horse."

"What could I do?" I demanded. "I couldn't help it. You saw how it all happened."

We carried the wet bags of wheat to the mill and the miller suggested that I find some carpets on which to spread the wheat and thus dry it. It had to be dried before it could be ground into flour. After the wheat had been dried, we put it into the grinder and made flour. My bread had been lost in the stream, so I took some of this flour to make more bread for myself. I poured some water on the flour, but I had too much water, so I poured some more flour in. Then I had too much flour, and I poured some more water in. Then more flour, more water, more flour, more water, until I finally had a huge trough full of dough. We made a fire, placed a large griddle over it, and started baking the bread.

"Which of us is going to eat this?" asked the miller.

"When it is ready, we shall both eat it," I said.

"No," said the miller, "Let us tell tales, and the one which tells the best tale will eat all of the bread." *Tale-telling contest-- to determine who gets bread*

"I don't know many tales," I said, *Storytelling contest -- (same)* "but, all right. You start first."

He began and told the following tale:

"Once upon a time, but there wasn't such a time, and it was forbidden to talk too much, God had many people, but it was a sin to say so. In that

*Tenerleme*

*pp 39-41 Tale within tale*

*story within story*

former time, I say, we had a hive of bees. One day one of the bees did not return, and so my grandmother said to me, 'The <sup>bee -- lame</sup> lame bee has not returned to the hive. Go and find it.' I went to the vegetable <sup>-- vegetable</sup> garden and there I saw many bees, but not the one which was lame. That bee I could not find, and so I lay down upon the grass and fell asleep.

"When I awoke next morning, I discovered that a man had caught our lame bee and was forcing it <sup>plowing -- with lame bee</sup> to pull a plow in the field until it was completely exhausted. I examined the bee and found that its neck and shoulders had been bruised by the yoke, and so I poured some water on the bruised parts and smeared some mud on them. After a while a sycamore tree <sup>-- grows on shoulder of lame bee</sup> started to grow from that mud on the bee's shoulders, and this tree prevented it from getting back into the hive. The children of the village had a habit of throwing mud clods at birds in the sycamore tree, and after three or four years of mud throwing, a whole field had been built up around it."

I interrupted the miller at this point to ask him, "What was the bee doing under all this?"

"Oh, he just kept chewing his cud to pass the time away,<sup>5</sup>" said the miller, and then he continued with his story.

"As I was saying, there was a field now at the foot of that sycamore tree. I sowed barley in that field, and when it was ripe, I went back to the field to reap it."

I interrupted the miller again and asked him, "And what was the bee doing then?"

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<sup>5</sup> The miller's answer drew a loud laugh from the audience, about fifty peasants, and Abdullah Aslan, being a sensitive raconteur, used the line several times again, with the same effect each time.



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"Oh, it was still chewing the cud," said the miller, and then he went on with his tale.

"Before I started reaping, I thought I might as well smoke a cigarette, so I sat down and smoked for a while. When I finished my cigarette and looked around, I saw that a hound was chasing a fox around the field, and the grain was swaying back and forth in the breeze they made. As the fox ran past me, his bushy tail caught the sickle and pulled it from my hand. As he ran round <sup>fox -- with sickle caught in tail -- reaps field of barley -- as it</sup> and round the field with this tool caught in his tail, he cut the barley <sup>runs round and around</sup> wherever he went. In no time at all, he had finished reaping that whole field."

Again I stopped the miller and asked, "What about the bee all this time?" <sup>to escape</sup> hound

"Still chewing the cud," said the miller.

"After that, I got my barley together, loaded it on my donkey and took it home. They gave me some copper money for it."

Now it was my turn to tell a story, and so I began at once:

<sup>work in</sup> <sup>Story</sup> <sup>for</sup> <sup>126</sup> "Where I come from, there is a big river called the Kizilirmak. <sup>River</sup> <sup>6</sup> I planted a hill of watermelons on one side of that river and a hill of pumpkins <sup>7</sup> on the other side. The vines from those plants grew very fast and hung over the banks of the river. In a short while they met and twined around each other, and the vines grew so thick that there was a wide mat right across the river that I could walk on. After a while people started to use this as a bridge. <sup>Bridge -- across river -- formed by intertwining of watermelon vine on one bank and pumpkin vine on other bank</sup>

- <sup>6</sup> The word Kizilirmak means Red River. The longest river in Turkey, it winds about for 715 miles in Central Anatolia. It is the subject of one of Turkey's most popular folk songs, a ballad about a wedding party drowned when a bridge collapsed. <sup>Bridge -- across river -- formed by intertwining of pumpkin vine on one bank -- with watermelon vine on opposite bank</sup>
- <sup>7</sup> Pumpkins are a more important food in Turkey than in America. They are prepared in a great variety of dishes.

Barley -- reaped by fox with sickle caught in tail

Grain -- " " " " " " " " " " " "

Pumpkin -- vine of -- on bank of river -- intertwined with watermelon vine -- on opposite bank -- to form bridge

Watermelon -- vine of -- " " " " " "

pumpkins

<sup>work in</sup>  
<sup>Story</sup>  
<sup>for</sup>  
<sup>126</sup>  
<sup>126</sup>  
<sup>PP. 41-42</sup>



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Pumpkin -- huge -- falls into river -- and causes division 42  
of stream  
River -- divided -- by huge pumpkin that falls into water

"There were just two pumpkins on the vine and only one watermelon on the other side of the river, but each was very large. When the one pumpkin was full grown, it fell from the vine before I could harvest it and landed in the middle of the river, causing the stream to divide into two at that point. The watermelon grew so large that I had to use two oxen, two water buffaloes, and two horses to drag it out of the field. I got a long pole and stuck it into the melon to serve as a wagon tongue, and then with the six animals, I dragged it to a mine where there were many men working. After splitting the melon with a crashing sound, I sold half of it to the miners for their entire food supply for one day, and the other half for the next day. Somebody bought the rind to make a shop for himself with it. Watermelon -- so large that dragging from field required two oxen, two buffaloes, and two horses

"Finally, the other pumpkin was getting ripe, and we prepared for a large feast on it. We had to get an enormous cauldron from somewhere to cook it, and so we ordered one made. Two men came and measured the pumpkin and started to make a special cauldron, but they could not find enough copper in the whole market to complete the job. It was such a big cauldron that when one coppersmith was hammering on one side of it, the other coppersmith working on the opposite side, could not even hear the clanging of his hammer."

At that point the miller interrupted me, saying, "Friend, you surpass me in exaggeration, and you have won."

I started eating the bread, while the miller sadly watched me, looking at my eyes. After I had finished eating the bread, the miller said to me, "What are you going to tell Ali Bey when you reach home?"

"I don't really know what to say," I answered.

"Why don't you tell him that I borrowed his horse for a day, and then, if you like, run away from there," said the miller.

Cauldron. so large that coppersmiths hammering on one side cannot hear those hammering on opposite side

I returned to the village with the two camels. Ali Bey asked me, "Where is the other camel?"

"It hurt its foot," I said, "and is coming along behind."

"What about the horse?"

"Well, the miller borrowed it for the day, but he will return it to you in the morning," I said. I think he was not pleased with what I told him, because he reached for his book, turned the pages, and found my name in it, Sorsavus of Haymana.

He paid me one nickel and two copper coins and then he said, "Get out of here. Let my eyes not see you in this village again."

I walked and walked and walked and after sunset I reached what looked like a village. There was moonlight, and I could distinguish a black shadow some distance away.

"Greetings to you," I said.

to me."

He took

then went to pull the donkey out of the mud.

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<sup>8</sup> He was a legendary prophet identified with Elijah of the 9th Century B.C., known also as Hızır-Elyas and Hızır-Elias -- Spring Day -- fertility rites held on Hızır-Elyas day -- called Hıdrellez (contracted form of HE). He was one of the very few people credited with having drunk the Abıhayat (or Abuhayat), the water of life, which gave immortality. Hızır drank of it; Köroğlu and his horse Kır At also drank of it. In Oriental tales, there are many people who search for this Old World "Fountain of Youth" without finding it. Alexander was supposed to have been one of them. Many legends say it was to be found somewhere in the Bingöl Mountains.--Hızır was supposedly sent by God to effect last-minute rescues when all other help had failed; he was a kind of deus ex machina for legends and tales.

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"You hold the donkey tight by the ears," I said, "and let me hold it tight by the tail. Then if we both give two or three hard pulls at the same time, we shall get it out." *Donkey -- tail of -- broken off while animal, being pulled from mud*

The man dipped his hands in mud so that he could get a good grip on the donkey's ears. We yanked once, and the donkey was halfway out. We yanked again and the donkey came out of the mud, but its tail came off in my hand. The owner did not notice what had happened, and I said nothing about it but just stuck the tail in the donkey's anus. After that, I did not want to stay there long, and so I started running away. The man was still working on his donkey, but after I had run away, he must have discovered the broken tail, because he shouted after me, "Hey, you mother-cursed man, you have broken off my donkey's tail!"

"I didn't do it," I shouted back, but I kept on running. About nine o'clock that evening I reached the village, but by then almost everyone there had gone to bed. I saw a light in the window of just one house. When I got to that house and knocked, a woman opened the door.

"Have you a room here for me for the night?" I asked her.

*through -- feeding*  
Pointing to the stable, she said, "You can sleep on straw in the feeding trough in there. I am glad you have come, for you can kill a sick ox that is in there for me. I do not want it to die of disease, for then it would be haram, and we could not eat it. I shall bring you a knife."

"All right," I said and took the knife. It was quite dark in the stable and so I had to grope my way to what I thought was the sick animal. I felt for its neck, put my knife to it, and started cutting. There was a "Sh--sh--sh" sound as the blood ran out. By that time the woman had returned with a lantern in her hand, and she almost fainted at what she saw.

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Fool -- kills colt in darkness -- instead of sick ox  
Story #47 Colt -- killed in darkness -- instead of sick ox -- by fool

Donkey -- son of -- as insulting expression  
"You donkey-born man!" she said. "Didn't you see what you were doing?"

You have cut the throat of my fine colt!"

We looked and saw that in the meantime the ox had died and could not now be eaten. I got my things together to run away, for I feared that she would call the gendarmes, but she simply kept on swearing at me, and then she went into the house and locked the door. I went to bed in the stable.

When it was about midnight, there was a knocking on the woman's door, and when she opened it, there was a man standing before it covered with mud. "My husband," she said, "What happened to you? Why are you so muddy?"

"Oh, I got my donkey stuck in the mud," he said. "A man came along and helped me get it out, but the mother-cursed man broke off my donkey's tail and then ran away."

"I wonder if it could be the same stupid man who is sleeping in the stable tonight?" she asked.

"What sort of jacket was he wearing?" asked the husband. "Was it a military jacket?" jacket -- military

"Yes," she said.

"Well, bring me my club, and I shall beat him," said the man.

Of course, by the time that he came out of the house to beat me, I was away from the stable and running down the road. But a number of dogs came after me and surrounded me, and the husband was shouting at the bekçi, "Catch that man! Don't let him get away!" I changed my direction, ran into a straw barn, and buried myself in the straw. I could hear the man telling the people who had gathered, "What a fool he was! He broke my donkey's tail off. He killed a fine, healthy colt and let a sick ox die. A terrible fellow!"

I must have fallen asleep in that straw barn, because it was much later that I opened my eyes and found the barn lighted. When I awoke, I saw a



*Sergeant -- of gendarmes*  
 woman and a gendarme sergeant talking to each other. It was clear that they were lovers.

The woman said, "What is it that you like so much about me?"

"I like the way you walk when you go to the fountain after water," said the sergeant. "What is it that you like about me?"

"I like the way in which you order about your recruits: 'Come here! Go there! Stand up! Lie down!'"

They sat down on the straw, and the sergeant said to the woman, "Pretend that you are walking to the fountain to get water." She walked across the barn and bent over as if filling a pitcher at the fountain, and the sergeant said, "What a lovely walk! What a shape!" To be able to see better, I stretched my neck out of the straw and almost fell out of my hiding place.

"All right, Sergeant," said the woman, "it's your turn now. Take your whip and let me see how you can order men about."

The sergeant started slashing his whip about to left and right, and he almost hit me. To protect myself, I must have moved a little, which was enough to bring me tumbling down out of the mow. This frightened both of them, and they ran away leaving me the lantern and a packet of food which they had brought along to eat

At dawn I left the straw barn and left that village. I felt very hungry on the way, because I was a young man at that time, so I pulled a big chunk of meat out of the packet and ate it. I walked for three days and then reached another village about sunset. I asked many people, "Have you got a room for me?" But they all said, "No, no, no." After trying many homes, I stopped by a house in which someone was moaning. I knocked on that door.

"Who is it?" a woman asked

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"A traveler," I said. "What is the matter with you?"

"I have a toothache, a very bad one," she said.

"That's easy, sister," I said. "I can take care of it." There were three big buns on a shelf, and I put two of them in my pocket and started eating the third. "Have you got a piece of string in the house?"

"How long?" she asked

"About a metre," I said.

"What are you going to do with it?" she asked.

"Tie it around your tooth," I said.

"No, no--I won't let you do that," she said.

"After the string is tied on, I won't touch it," I said. Finally she consented to let me help her, so I tied one end of the string around her tooth and the other end around her toe. I then pinched her on the buttock, and she jumped up straight, and the tooth was yanked out.

The woman swore at me in a most frightful manner, "Your father's wife was a whore! You terrible man with a foul past! Get out of here!" These were just some of the things that she said to me.

Finally, I reached the plain just north of here, and I went to the fountain there to drink some water. I saw approaching someone that I knew. It was Hasan Uyar. (You knew Hasan--he is dead now.) Hasan did not remember me, I had been away so long, and he suspected that I was a thief. When I reached for my handkerchief, he thought I was reaching for a pistol. He shouted and a whole group of people came and surrounded me. When I told them who I was, they were amazed. They all thought I had been killed by the Greeks and when they saw that I was still alive, they all invited me to come and drink coffee with them. It took me a whole week to visit everyone of them.